

# Parish of Central Exeter

## Sunday before Lent

14<sup>th</sup> February 2021

...and the greatest of these is love.

Welcome everyone.

*Our reflections this morning are by Sheila, with the intercessions provided by Jess. Many thanks to you both.*



*This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Make sure you use up your eggs and butter for pancakes on Tuesday! And today celebrate St Valentine!*

### Call to Worship

Lord God  
We come to worship today to hear your good news,  
to hear of faith, hope and love  
ringing out from your kingdom.  
We know that doubt, fear and hatred  
can shake even the strongest.

Shape us into faithful hopeful people,  
fill us with your love that passes all understanding.  
We pray this together in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

*(by Carol Penner)*

### Gathering Hymn

Love Divine, all loves excelling. Sung here at by the choir of Trinity College Cambridge. The descants after the first verse make this a memorable version. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FYf2qnFKX4>

## Moment to reflect

"...Now faith, hope and love abide, these three..."

doubt moves in  
and props its feet  
at the hearth of my soul,  
warming them  
on the coals of my unbelief;  
while faith  
rents space  
for a few days  
in the summers of my life.

despair is the frayed,  
soft corduroy jacket  
that fits comfortably  
on my shoulders  
while hope  
is a hair shirt  
i resist wearing.

impatience is the face  
i put on  
each morning  
in order to greet the world,  
while love  
is that mask  
i wear occasionally,  
removing it  
when i look in the mirror,  
not recognizing myself.

which three will abide in me, O God?

which three?

Amen.

*(Thom M. Shuman. Posted on Prayers4Today.)*



## **Collect for the Sunday before Lent**

O Lord, who hast taught us  
that all our doings without charity  
are nothing worth:  
Send thy Holy Ghost,  
and pour into our hearts  
that most excellent gift of charity,  
the very bond of peace  
and of all virtues,  
without which whosoever liveth  
is counted dead before thee.  
Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

## **Worship song**

My Song is love unknown. Sung here by the Choir of St Martins in the Field's London.  
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv7OZSoA22w>

## **Readings**

### **I Corinthians 13**

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.

## Reflection

While society marks Valentine's Day with red hearts abounding, albeit in a more muted way this year due to the restrictions, our BCP lectionary for the Sunday before Lent brings us this great hymn to love from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Read often at weddings, funerals, or memorial services it can become separated from the context of the letter in which Paul is writing to a community of believers whose behaviour he critiques. He has seen the divisions within the group and has encouraged both unity and diversity with mutual respect in the previous section. Now he says that love is the most important thing. Nothing else is of lasting value.

What, we may ask, is 'love'? – an over-used word in English. We know that there are different forms of love and that other languages have various words to denote 'love'. The *agape* term for love used in the New Testament was not in popular use at the time but was adopted by Christians to describe the quality of love seen in Jesus's life. This is the love that God gives to everyone and which Jesus expected his followers to show.

In this passage Paul describes such love with active verbs – expecting such actions to be part of daily life. They are the gold standard by which we measure our lives. Many people have commented on this passage including Henry Drummond, a Scottish biologist and evangelist. He gave an address in 1890 which became a popular little book called 'The Greatest Thing in the World'. He compares the description of love in verses 4-6 to the way light passing through a glass prism separates into its component colours.

'The Spectrum of love has nine ingredients: Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Humility, Courtesy, Unselfishness, Good temper, Guilelessness, Sincerity.'

He notes that these qualities are all to do with our relationships with each other. They are very practical. He comments on kindness – this is love in action. Jesus went about showing kindness.

Every day we hear stories both of people showing great love and being kind and generous while at the same time we are aware of abuse, cruelty, greed, violence, and other evils in our society. Yet even within ourselves we know that 'we have left undone the things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done',

in the words of Cranmer's confession for Morning and Evening Prayer. Lent is a time when we can reflect and renew our commitment to follow God's ways. The following two poetic offerings may be helpful in this regard.

Janet Morley's book of poems for Lent has George Herbert's 'Trinity Sunday' for Thursday after Ash Wednesday. She suggests that its three short stanzas are a suitable starting point for Lent. The first recognises our humanity and the salvation that God has worked for us in Christ. The second is a confession while the final three lines are a plea for a daily infilling of faith, hope and love to live our Christian life.

Lord, who has form'd me out of mud,  
And has redeem'd me through thy blood,  
And sanctified me to do good;

Purge all my sins done heretofore;  
For I confess my heavy score,  
And I will strive to sin no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,  
With faith, with hope, with charity;  
That I may run, rise, rest with thee.

In 2015 The Climate Change Coalition launched its first 'Show the Love' campaign for the first three weeks of February as a way to highlight the need to care about the climate crisis and associated environmental issues. They encourage both pressure on political leaders and individual practical action to show love to our natural world.

*'Show the Love' Prayer Green Christian*

O God who is love  
Let love empower our compassion  
Let love embrace each and everyone  
Let love unite humans and non-human  
In restorative co-existence.

O Jesus, love come down to earth  
May we honour the earth  
May we honour all that dwells in the earth  
May we be reconciled with the earth  
Become what we are, of the earth.

O Spirit of love  
Grant us a spirit of humility  
Grant us a spirit of carefulness  
Grant us a spirit of friendship  
For the earth and all that dwells with us here.

**Toni Bennett**

### **Affirmation of Faith**

Affirmation of Faith for Complex Times – Red Create, Argentina

We believe in divine tenderness,  
which is no stranger to our anxieties,  
which is generously supportive in Jesus of Nazareth,  
a tireless walker to the directions that herald Life.

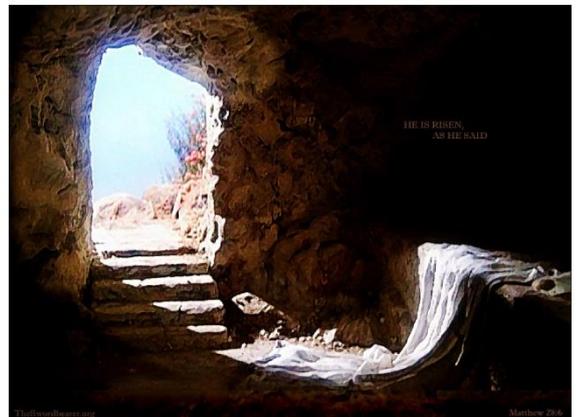
We affirm our faith and renew our hopes  
in times of uncertainty, isolation, sickness and death,  
because we have heard the proclamation  
of those who have promised us the enduring life,  
the liberation of every strip of darkness.

***You are life and resurrection,  
you are our Force in times of affliction.  
You are life and resurrection,  
you are our Light, friend and Saviour.***

We recognize ourselves with a thirst for hugs  
and hungry for encounters,  
longing for the communions that are now distant to us,  
but we confess that in God we do not fear or be discouraged  
and that we will wait patiently and confidently  
for the time of re-meetings and the shared table.

We believe in the networks that sustain us  
and in the words that cross distances to keep company,  
we discover the value of applause and music  
and the distant closeness of loved people.  
And we see there too, flashes of divine grace.

***You are life and resurrection,  
you are our Force in times of affliction.  
You are life and resurrection,  
you are our Light, friend and Saviour.***



## Intercessions

Ever-living God, our creator and redeemer, you love us and know us so much better than we know ourselves and we know that you will hear us when we pray:

Loving God, we pray for the worldwide church in all its diversity. We pray for churches which meet in difficult and often dangerous circumstances and also at this time of pandemic for all who cannot meet in person. May they and we feel your abiding presence to give us courage and strengthen our faith.

Lord may your face to shine upon us; in your mercy hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for your world and its people, with all their needs, questions and longings. So often we struggle to understand events like this coronavirus pandemic and yet we know that in the midst of such happenings your love is shown in the acts of bravery, selflessness and compassion which follow. We pray for all who work and suffer in such dreadful circumstances, and for the people high and low who are responsible for the work of recovery that we hope will grow and be rolled out around the whole earth.

Lord may your face shine upon us; in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for our own community, that each of us might make as much use as we can of our individual talents, enabling us to flourish as witnesses to the 'one body' of the church. Help us to spread the warmth of your love to everyone we meet, whether in person or online.

Lord may your face shine upon us; in your mercy hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for those in need, especially for those who are waiting for treatment, surgery, tests or test results, the housebound, those in care homes, hospitals and hospices and for all who care for them, whose love and compassion bring medical, material and spiritual comfort. In a moment of quiet, we bring before you all the people we know who are in need of prayer or who have asked us to pray for them.....

Lord may your face shine upon us; in your mercy hear our prayer.

Loving God, be close to those who feel the pain of the loss of a loved one, whether recent or as each anniversary passes. Help us to support all those who mourn, with our prayers, words of comfort and, where we can, with practical help as they struggle to come to terms with their loss, however long ago it may be.

Lord, may your face shine upon us; in your mercy hear our prayer.

Loving God, be with us during this coming week and give us the will each day to live a loving life. To paraphrase St Paul, love is what we are all about.

God of love, accept these prayers for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

## A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## An offertory prayer

*We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.*

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,  
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.  
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,  
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to 'The Love of God comes close.' This is a hymn by John Bell through the Iona Community. Played and sung here at Guildwood Community Presbyterian Church, Ontario, Canada. No video but the words are on the screen.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdNp80yi71Q>

*Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.*



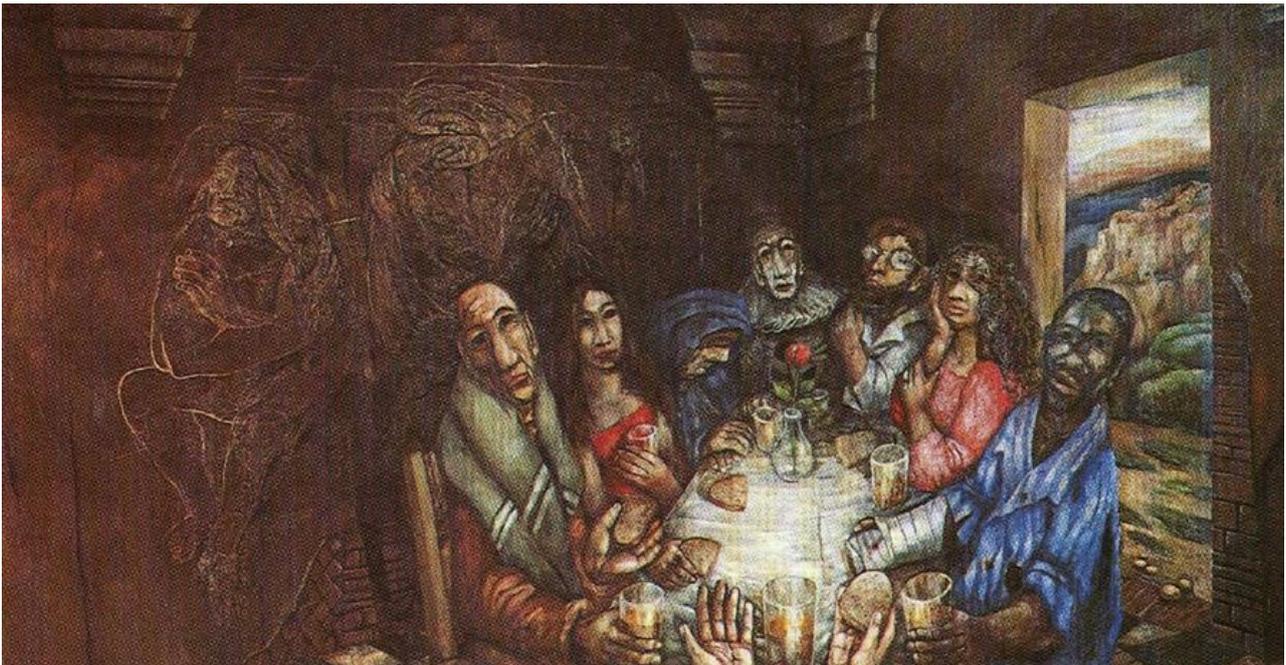
*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.



### **Post Communion Collect**

Holy God,  
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:  
put right our crooked hearts,  
and bend our wills to love your goodness  
and your glory  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.



Jesus eating with tax-collectors and sinners by Sieger Koder – a German priest and artist.

## **Love Is...**

Love is... hugs  
Love is... a pick me up  
Love is... when two become one  
Love is... friendship  
Love is... sharing the last piece of pizza  
Love is... hard to explain  
Love is... unbelievable  
Love is... unpredictable  
Love is... giving away your last rolo  
Love is... endless  
Love is... protection  
Love is... a rollercoaster  
Love is... a smile  
Love is... a heartbeat  
Love is... patient  
Love is... kind  
Love is... a never ending story  
Love is... eternal  
Love is... a circle of friends  
Love is... a circle of eternity  
Love is... a circle called God  
Love is... all you need

*(Roddy Hamilton, and posted on Listening to the Stones.)*

## **Commission & Benediction**

Imagine what else would change today  
if we dared demand it of love.

If we didn't stop where the rules ended,  
were no longer bound by common sense  
or right and wrong  
or justice and fairness  
and who deserves what.

If we expected life for all  
anyway...

*(Cheryl Lawrie, and posted on <http://holdthisspace.org.au/>)*

Love wholeheartedly.  
Live as you were created.  
Be God's people in our fragmented world. Amen.

*(Tim Graves and posted on LiturgyBits.)*

## Closing Music

Well it's not often we have a chance to close with the Fab Four, but it does fit the theme for this morning! 'All you need is love' – words appear on the screen in English and Spanish.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq5SwK0bGCM>



*Scroll down for Coffee Break*

## Coffee Break

The long-awaited vaccination process is now well under way. Richard has written this invocation which reminds us that this jab can be more than skin-deep.

O Vaccine

the longed-for and long-awaited  
vanquisher of viral legions;  
stimulator of the immune system,  
to render unreactive the renegade RNA;  
you are the injection of hope:  
come, combat the virus in our soul,  
restore to us the health of body and spirit.

*Richard Skinner 2021*

It is Valentine's Day, and this is one of the more famous love poems.

### ***A Red Red Rose     Robert Burns***

Oh my luvie is like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June:  
Oh my luvie is like the melodie,  
That's sweetly play'd in tune.  
As fair art thou, my bonie lass,  
So deep in luvie am I;  
And I will luvie thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.  
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;  
And I will luvie thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run.  
And fare thee weel, my only luvie!  
And fare thee weel a while!  
And I will come again, my luvie,  
Tho' it were ten thousand mile!



This is a poem that cries out to be set to music. This is one version that you might like to curl up to!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QK9WK0QhejA>

**Scroll down for night prayer**

# Night Prayer

Sunday before Lent  
14<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## Transfiguration

### Preparation

Behind all things  
behind the grey surface  
there is a glory escaping  
born of heaven  
and belonging to heaven



a light that welcomes  
a more profound way of seeing things  
that transfigures the world

that casts a spell of hope  
that sees the glory in the cross  
and life within death

it is a glory  
that meets us here  
on this mountain  
where Jesus Christ  
covered in the dust of the world  
is caught up in the glory of heaven

welcome to the mountain

*(Rev. Roddy Hamilton, and posted on Listening to the Stones.)*

### Hymn

Transfiguration – ‘Jesus stands on the mountain peak.’ This may well be a new song for you. Sung here at St Francis de Sales parish church, Ajax, Ontario, Canada. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJec8-pfVQk>

## Confession

He came bathed in light, dazzling, radiant...

Forgive us, God,  
for accepting mediocrity in your name  
and calling it good enough.

He came appearing with Elijah and Moses...

Forgive us, God,  
for demanding exclusive expressions of faith  
even in the face of your expansive vision.

He came while a voice was shouting, "this is my Beloved; listen!"

Forgive us, God,  
for silencing the voice of the other  
struggling to praise your name.

(Katherine Hawker. Posted on her Liturgy Outside website)

## Reading Mark 9 2-10

### The Transfiguration

<sup>2</sup> After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.



*Northern Israel seen from Mt Tabor (the Mount of the Transfiguration)*

## **Reflection**

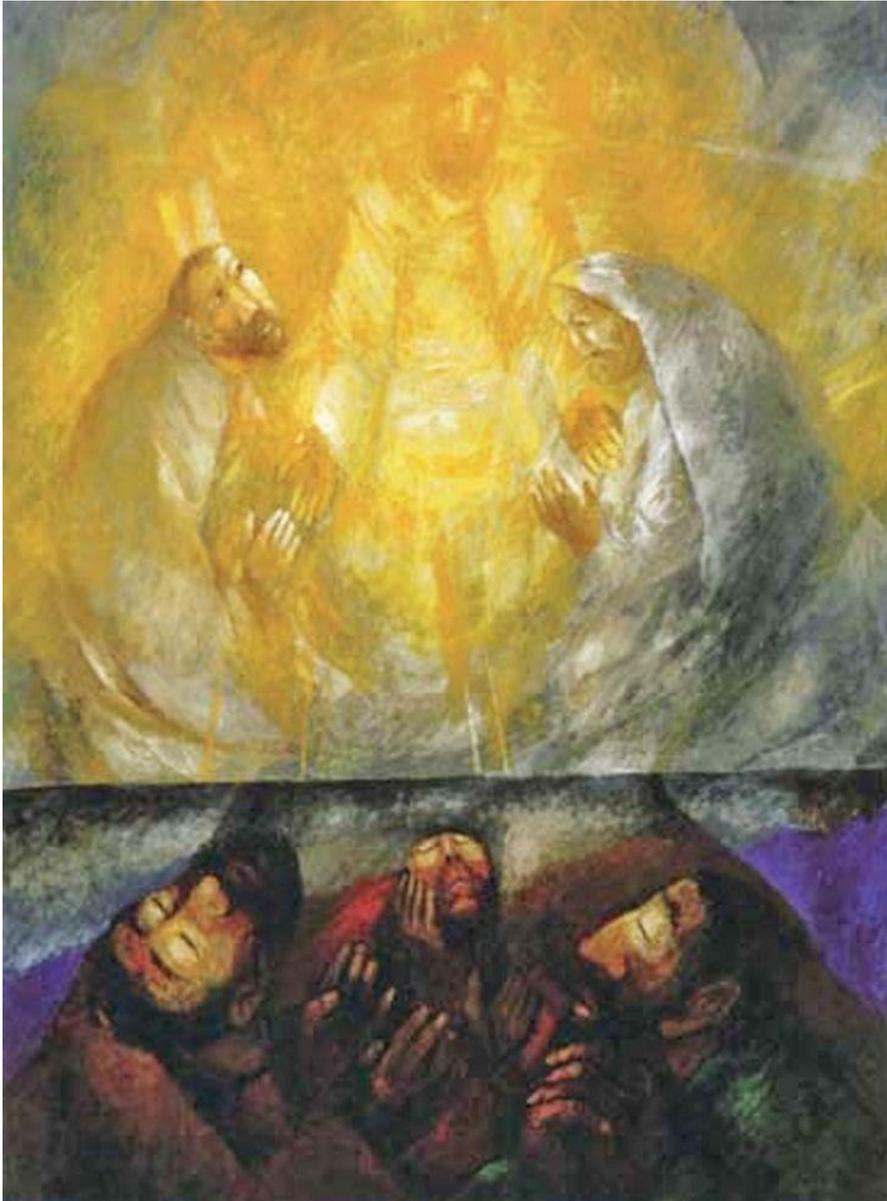
The world of our senses is well known to us – it is the real world of our daily experience. Yet almost all religions or spiritual movements recognise there is more to life than the one our senses experience. This ‘other’ world seems as it were to be veiled off from our normal experience. But every now and then the veil seems to part and we find ourselves in what the Celtic tradition calls a ‘thin place’, where divine and human, matter and spirit, eternal and temporal are not separate and we are briefly in union, wholeness, and ultimately holiness.

Jesus led Peter, James and John to a thin place, where human ears would hear God’s voice, human eyes would see divine light, and human life would be enveloped in the cloud of God’s presence. For them, this was a transforming experience.

But this is not simply a story about Peter, James, and John. It is descriptive of Christ’s encounter with all humanity. We too are called to the thin places. We too are invited to step through the parted veil. The possibility of transfiguration is all around us. Jesus is always leading us to the thin places of our life.

Peter tries to prolong the experience by suggesting they build some form of memorial structure. But this is not to be. These encounters do not last – they are fleeting moments. We have to come down the mountain and back into our everyday world.

We do not often talk about our experiences of the thin places. Instead, like Peter, James, and John, we keep silent telling no one of our encounter. It is not because those encounters are not real. It is, rather, because they are too real, too real for words. Words could never describe the experience and would only diminish the mystery and greatness of that encounter. We are now different and can never quite go back to the way it was before. That moment of transfiguration now resides eternally within us. We live astounded having experienced the greatness of God.



Wonder

by Sieger Koder.

This is his response to  
the Transfiguration

### **Wonder**

His glorified body translucent  
Greeted by seekers from of old,  
The long-awaited Messiah  
Now revealed in all his splendour.  
The old covenant  
Is sealed with the new.

Watching from below  
From the world of mortals  
The three disciples are blessed  
With a glimpse of heaven.

On the mountain top  
The light from the world of the living  
Penetrates the shell of the body  
And they can see with their inner eyes,  
The awe-inspiring vision.

It is so good to be here,  
Blissfully content in God's splendour-  
The glory of the beloved Son.  
Listen to him!

The Son of Man has to suffer  
To enter his glory.

Death is only the doorway.  
We can now see him  
As in a mirror.  
Then we shall see him as he really is.  
We shall be forever  
In the splendour of God's Glory.

#### **A prayer from Saint Francis of Assisi.**

Our Father,  
each day is a little life,  
each night a tiny death;  
help us to live with faith and hope and love.  
Lift our duty above drudgery;  
let not our strength fail, or the vision fade,  
in the heat and burden of the day.

O God, make us patient and pitiful one with another  
in the fret and jar of life,  
remembering that each fights a hard fight  
and walks a lonely way.  
Forgive us, Lord, if we hurt our fellow souls;  
teach us a gentler tone, a sweeter charity of words,  
and a more healing touch.  
Sustain us, O God, when we must face sorrow;  
give us courage for the day and hope for the morrow.  
Day unto day may we lay hold of thy hand and look up into thy face,  
whatever befall,  
until our work is finished and the day is done. Amen.  
(*St. Francis of Assisi, 1181-1226.*)

## **Blessing**

May the light of Your glory  
illuminate our path this day and every day,  
showing us the truth of Your presence  
amid the lies of the unjust kingdoms of this world.

Turning to the tasks You have prepared for us,  
And the people You have set us among:  
Make our feet sure and fleet,  
the bearers of good news.

## **Closing music**

'Song of the Transfiguration' by David Haas. You will know the tune.  
Words are below

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkUkCjIFAQE>

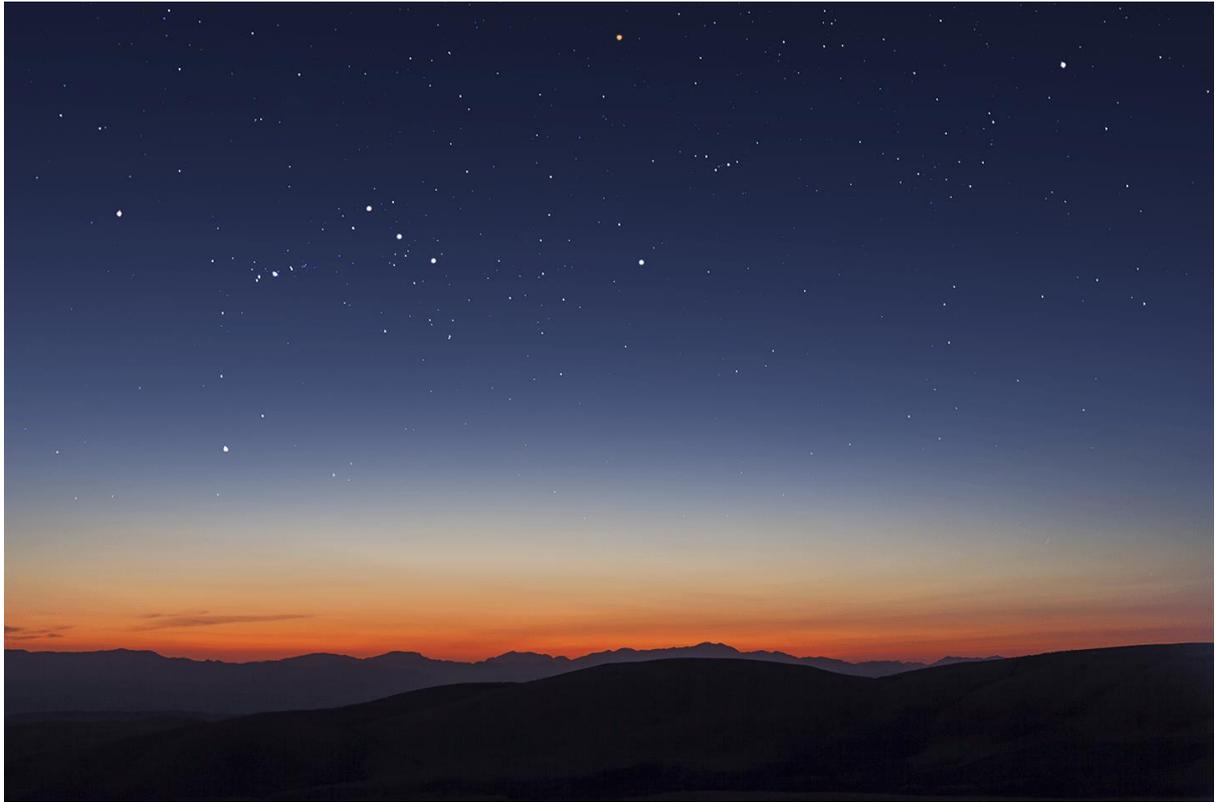
Transform us as you, transfigured,  
Stood apart on Tabor's height.  
Lead us up our sacred mountains,  
Search us with revealing light.  
Lift us from where we have fallen,  
Full of questions, filled with fright.

Transform us as you, transfigured,  
Once spoke with those holy ones.  
We, surrounded by the witness  
Of those saints whose work is done,  
Live in this world as your Body,  
Chosen daughters, chosen sons....

Transform us as you, transfigured,  
Would not stay within a shrine.  
Keep us from our great temptation  
Time and truth we quickly bind.  
Lead us down those daily pathways  
Where our love is not confined.

## **Thanks**

*Thanks to everyone who has participated, Sheila for the morning reflections and suggesting exploring the artwork of Sieger Koder, Jess for the intercessions, Richard for his invocation. Material taken or adapted from other websites has an attribution made where possible.*



*The constellation visible here is Orion, the Hunter. If you can bear the cold on a clear night, it is now dominant in our Southwestern sky. The red star centre top is Betelgeuse, bottom left is Rigel and the three stars in the middle form his belt.*